

# MED newsletter

MEDIA ETHICS DIVISION WINTER 2020 • VOLUME 23, NO. 2

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

BY **TOM BIVINS**, NEWSLETTER EDITOR



**WELCOME TO THE ROARING '20S!** Well, at least not the Boring '20s. As we enter a new decade (the second of the new century in the new millennium), the world seems much changed—sometimes for the better; other times, not so much. As we struggle to find our place in this (literally) new environment, we should take care to learn from our past mistakes, and our successes.

The last '20s decade opened with the success of the women's suffrage movement finally codified in the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. In some ways the 1920s was the decade of the "new woman," born from suffrage and nurtured on jazz and bobbed hair. It was a decade that worked hard to counter the effects of the first decade of that millennium, marked by world war and pandemic. It was also a decade of a struggle for identity, for both the country and its people—a struggle that played out in its music, its fashion, its literature, and its philosophy.

Walter Lippmann and John Dewey explored the role of media in a modern democracy, while Edward Bernays and Ivy Lee attempted to merge the art of persuasion with the new science of psychology. At the same time authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald helped to illustrate the flamboyance and excess of the Jazz Age with his novels and short stories through which he literally defined the "youth movement" especially the *new*, new woman—the Flapper.

At the same time, the "New Negro Movement" was underway in Harlem fed by the writings of African-American artists such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, and supported by publications such as *The Voice*, the first newspaper of the burgeoning movement.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR .....1

Newsletter Editor Tom Bivins moralizes

WELCOME TO THE NEW YEAR.... 2

Division Head Marlene Neill shows us where we are and where we should go

PROGRAM FOR AEJMC SFO ..... 3

Vice Head/Programming Chair Katy Culver lays out a diverse schedule for next August

THE BEST TEACHER IS EXPERIENCE.. 4

Research Chair Nicole Kraft explores the urgent topics we ought to be talking about

MED PAPERS CALL... 4-6

Nicole follows up with this year's paper call (there's a lot to consider)

ADVICE & CONSENT... 7-8

Editor Tom Bivins kicks off a new case study column and asks for future submissions

### NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

If this issue seems short, it is. We would very much like to see more submissions so that I don't have to resort to filling space with my own prattle. I note, however, that the grad student committee offered but we didn't have time to get it organized before deadline.

# MED newsletter

Division Chair: **Marlene Neill**

Vice Head/Programming Chair: **Kathleen Bartzel Culver**

Newsletter Editor: **Tom Bivins**

Newsletter Layout & Design: **Tom Bivins**

MED newsletter is published quarterly by the Media Ethics Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Direct questions to [tbivins@uoregon.edu](mailto:tbivins@uoregon.edu)



As it turned out, the decade of the 1920s, with all its advancements, was merely a 10-year hiatus between wars and worldwide social collapse. So . . . what will we do to shake of the dust of our previous decade—one rife with global upheaval and climate catastrophe? Will we change? Can we change?

How do we, as ethicists, attempt to guide another new generation through another new '20s decade, into a perilous future? How do we explain the importance of truth and dignity in a world where it increasingly doesn't seem to matter?

I was warned many years ago by a member of an earlier generation of media ethicists not to moralize so much in my writings. And again, a few years later, by a dean referring to my classroom lectures. I tried hard to play the role of the neutral observer all the while ignoring the

very real obligation to warn my students of what they might face in their future lives. So, this is my moralizing part.

We all must take part of the blame for the condition of our world. Each new generation enters adulthood wanting to change the future. Why is it, then, that it doesn't seem to change? Maybe, as the the Eagles noted in their song *Hotel California*, (in 1970, when I was part of the new generation), "We are all just prisoners here, of our own devise." Or maybe, like my hero Mark Twain, I just get grumpier with age.

That may be why my final lecture in each ethics class is advice from someone a lot wiser than me: "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

Tom

## WELCOME TO A NEW YEAR!

BY MARLENE NEILL, DIVISION HEAD



Happy New Year! As we all are making plans for the new year, I hope many of you will make travel plans to join us at the annual AEJMC conference in San Francisco Aug. 6-9. Kathleen Culver, our programming chair, has been working hard to secure co-sponsored panels for the conference which include five teaching

panels, two PF&R (Professional Freedom and Responsibility) panels and one research panel. Please check out the specific details in this newsletter. Meanwhile, Nicole Kraft, our research chair, has prepared the call for papers. I hope many of you and your students will consider submitting papers this year. In addition to our open call and graduate student paper call, we have a special call this year for papers focused on media ethics in international contexts. For the second year, we will be offering the Penn State Davis Ethics Award for dissertations successfully defended in 2019. Thank you to Penn State and Patrick Plaisance for offering this award through our division. The details can be found in the January 2020 AEJMC newsletter.

Please consider volunteering to serve as a paper reviewer this year. Most divisions give priority to paper reviewers when assigning discussants and moderators for the research paper sessions. You can contact Nicole to be added to the paper reviewer list. We usually try not to assign any more than three papers to each reviewer and having a sufficient pool of volunteer reviewers will help us achieve this goal.

In other news, the Ethics subcommittee for the Commission on Public Relations Education has released its re-

port with recommendations regarding what should be taught in a public relations ethics course. The committee's findings were presented at the PRSA Educators Academy Super Saturday conference in San Diego in October. You can read the full report at:

<http://www.commissionpred.org/commission-reports/>

2020 represents an important milestone for public relations ethics, the 20th anniversary of the revised PRSA code of ethics. One of our members, Kathy Fitzpatrick of American University, helped lead the three-year process of revising and updating the code of ethics. The process was described in-depth in two journal articles published in the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* in 2002. The code of ethics is valued by PRSA members as it consistently ranks as one of the most important resources offered to members in surveys and receives focused attention each September during ethics month.

Finally, I continue to appreciate the contributions of our division volunteers leading up to the 2020 conference and would like to publicly thank them for their service: Kathleen Culver, vice-head and programming chair; Nicole Kraft, research chair; Jan Leach, teaching chair; Diana Sisson, PF&R chair; Tom Bivins, newsletter editor; Lindsay Palmer, social media chair; and graduate committee members Yuyu Feng and Shiyu Yang. In addition, Chad Painter is leading our mentoring program. Feel free to reach out to us with questions and recommendations.

Sincerely,

Marlene

# DIVERSE SLATE OF MED PROGRAMMING SET FOR SAN FRANCISCO

BY KATHLEEN BARTZEN CULVER, VICE HEAD/PROGRAMMING CHAIR



If you've ever seen the orange juice commodities scene in the movie "Trading Places," you have a sense of what I felt like as the Media Ethics Division's programming chair back in October. I'm in charge of setting up our research, teaching and professional freedom and responsibility panels for San Francisco, and I can tell you, the process is intense.

But thanks to outstanding and original proposals, we were able to meet our division goal of landing four panels proposed by our members and four more put forth by other divisions and interest groups.

Another goal for this year was to diversify the type of programming MED sponsors, as well as the people participating on the panels. To that end, I am working with seven different MED members to provide panel leadership, including a graduate student and recent graduate to keep new ideas flowing. We are keeping all kinds of diversity in mind – age, gender, race/ethnicity, methodological approach, small/large program, etc. I think San Francisco promises an exciting slate for our division.

Many thanks to the following for their leadership:

- Deborah Dwyer
- Nicole Kraft
- Jan Leach
- Mike Mirer
- Chad Painter
- Allan Richards
- Anita Varma

Please mark your calendars for all our sessions. We aim for maximum MED turnout. Also, if you have colleagues with research interests related to any of the sessions below, please forward word to them, as well. Member word of mouth is MED's best marketing tool.

Title	Type	Co-Sponsor	Day	Time
When "shining a light" is no longer enough: Rethinking the social responsibility of journalists in the new marketplace of ideas	PF&R	Mass Comm & Society	Thursday, 8/6	11:45-1:15
Top tech tools for efficient and inclusive teaching	Teaching	Small Programs	Thursday, 8/6	1:30-3
Sports media as a site for social awareness	Teaching	Electronic News	Friday, 8/7	10-11:30
Codebreaker: Teaching media ethics beyond the code of ethics	Teaching	Cultural and Critical Studies	Friday, 8/7	11:45-1:15
Interviewing tough subjects and situations: Teaching students to interview administrators and students in crisis	Teaching	Scholastic Journalism	Friday, 8/7	3:15-4:45
Journalism as an act of citizenship	PF&R	Participatory Journalism	Friday, 8/7	8:15-9:45
Scandal, stigma, and sexualization: How sharing sensational and sensitive information relates to calls for privacy protection	Research	Law & Policy	Saturday, 8/8	8:15-9:45
Teaching less extractive reporting	Teaching	Newspaper and Online News	Saturday, 8/8	11:30-1

Look for more info on programming on the MED mailing list, Facebook group and Twitter account as we get closer to the conference. If you have any questions, please feel free to [email me](#).



# MEDIA ETHICS: THE BEST TEACHER IS EXPERIENCE

BY NICOLE KRAFT, RESEARCH CHAIR



Conflict between the U.S. and Iran, wildfires raging through Australia, Brexit, corruption allegations in Israel. There is no shortage of international media coverage—and no better time to visit media ethics as they apply to international media.

That was the thought process of the Media Ethics division's research arm, as it continues to explore and explain the topics that challenge media from all ethical sides.

Kate Culver of the University of Wisconsin-Madison was key to that decision in her last acts before giving up the research chair for the teaching chair. She said the division constantly strives to provide answers to the ethical challenges faced by media, and the increased international attention on media ethics made this an ideal time for such a research focus.

"It's important the industry to understand its declining trust," she said. "We can turn to research to get answers and make tighter connection between media practice and research."

Patrick Plaisance, editor of the Journal of Media Ethics, mentioned during his yearly report in Toronto the priority to feature more non-US, non-Western, media ethics scholarship and he is starting to see results with increased submissions. To advance those effort he offered

a special issue on "International Methods of Inquiry" in 2019 and hopes to continue similar efforts.

While United States media is founded in the broad concepts of individual rights found in the First Amendment, Culver noted that other cultures may have a broader view—approached through a lens of communitarianism. Research into how different ethical foundations impact media can provide a stronger foundation for all producers and consumers.

"Media ethicists sound the alarm bell about public trusts," she said. "What happens when the public does not see we are here to serve public trust."

"It's an insanely difficult time to be a citizen right now. What can be believed and can't be believed. Work in media ethics can help define what is and is not reliable information."

Research generated through the Media Ethics Division is dedicated to fostering a better understanding of the role ethics plays in the development and consumption of media, and the international call will hopefully play a significant part in the context of news, as well as strategic communication, advertising and public relations—and even political pundits and advocates.

"I cannot imagine a time more important to be thinking about media ethics," Culver said.

For more information in submitting research to the MED division, please review the research call.



---

## MED PAPER CALLS

### MEDIA ETHICS DIVISION

The Media Ethics Division announces the following calls for AEJMC 2020 in San Francisco:

1. Open Call
2. Special Call for Papers on international topics in media ethics
3. Burnett Award Graduate Student Papers

The Division sponsors the following awards:

1. Carol Burnett Award for Graduate Students
2. Penn State Davis Ethics Award (new for 2019)
3. Professional Relevance Award
4. Top Faculty Paper Award



## DIVISION PAPER CALLS

**Open Call:** The Media Ethics Division seeks a diverse range of original faculty and graduate student paper submissions related to ethics. The division encourages submissions that address a broad spectrum of ethics-related topics and concerns, which may include, but are not limited to, ethical decision-making, moral development, truth-telling and deception, privacy, credibility, the relationship between journalism and democracy, the impact of technology and economics on ethics, organizational norms and routines, accountability systems, corporate social responsibility and advocacy, global ethics, audience considerations, applied ethics in journalism, advertising and public relations, and the relationship between law and ethics. In addition to our regular call, the Division is sponsoring a special call focusing on media ethics in international contexts (see below).

The division seeks the broadest possible range of theoretical, methodological and pedagogical scholarship, looking at ethics across a range of media contexts including journalism, advertising, public relations, entertainment, new media, social media, etc.; from a range of theoretical/paradigmatic approaches such as philosophical, critical, sociological, psychological, etc.; and using a range of methods including qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. Essays grounded in ethics theory are welcome, as well.

All papers should adhere to APA style (6th ed.); must be no more than 25 pages (excluding title page, references, figures, illustrations, and/or appendices); should be double-spaced, use 1-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman or equivalent font; should be saved as Word or PDF; and must otherwise conform to the rules outlined in the AEJMC Uniform Call for Papers. Papers that do not conform to these rules or contain information identifying the author(s) will be disqualified. The Division strongly advises authors to submit papers with sufficient time to review them in the All Academic system and ensure identifying information is removed.

Submitting a paper to the Media Ethics Division implies that the author (or one of the co-authors) intends to present the paper in person at the conference.

**Special Call for International Topics in Media Ethics:** In addition to our regular call, the Media Ethics Division is sponsoring a special call for papers focused on international topics related to media ethics. Special call papers should present research that addresses a topic related to communication and ethics, and how they are applied or interpreted through an international lens. Examples include (but are not limited to) ethical aspects of journalism practice on the international stage, the practice of serving specific populations, dissemination of news around the globe, international journalism codes of ethics, international communication and public relations, and reporting or communicating on global ethical issues. The Division encourages papers from a range of scholarly approaches – critical, philosophical, theoretical, empirical, legal, historical – and a range of methods – qualitative, quantitative and mixed. The Division will not accept commentaries about teaching or sets of teaching tips.

Submissions should adhere to length and style guidelines for the Division open call. Special call papers must be marked “Special Call: International Topics” on the title page.

**Burnett Award Graduate Student Papers:** The Media Ethics Division is committed to supporting and promoting promising graduate students with an interest in research related to any of the many aspects of media ethics. All graduate students who submit full papers to the Media Ethics Division (in this call, the Open Call or the International Media Ethics Call) are automatically entered into the Carol Burnett Award competition. The Media Ethics Division teams with the University of Hawaii, the Carol Burnett Fund for Responsible Journalism and Kappa Tau Alpha to sponsor this honor for graduate students.

Students are invited to submit papers on any topic related to media ethics, from any theoretical approach, using any method or combination of methods.

The winning paper and runner-up will receive the Carol Burnett/University of Hawaii/AEJMC Prize, which includes a monetary award. Authors for the top two submissions also receive a small travel assistance stipend. The winner will be invited to accept his or her prize at the Kappa Tau Alpha Awards Luncheon at the AEJMC conference. Graduate student papers must include graduate student status on the title page. The Burnett Award is reserved for graduate students, and papers with faculty co-authors are ineligible.

Graduate students with work in the nascent stages of development may submit to this call. Works in progress accepted within this call may be presented in poster sessions. Graduate student works in progress, however, are not eligible for the Burnett Award.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)

## DIVISION AWARDS

**Professional Relevance Award:** The Division gives special recognition to a paper that is judged to be the most relevant to working professionals in a media industry. The recipient will be selected from the open and special calls.

**Top Faculty Paper:** The Division gives special recognition to the faculty paper judged to be the best paper submitted among faculty authors.

**The Penn State Davis Ethics Award:** Scholars who have successfully defended ethics-related dissertations in the 2019 calendar year are encouraged to apply for the new Penn State Davis Ethics Award. The award provides a \$1,000 honorarium, travel support to present their scholarship in a session of the Media Ethics Division at the 2020 AEJMC annual conference, and a fully supported guest-lecture visit to Penn State's Bellisario College of Communications. The Don W. Davis Professor in Ethics at Penn State, Patrick Lee Plaisance, will administer all aspects of the award competition and selection process.

Applications should include a cover letter stating applicant's ethics-related focus and contact information, statement of defense date, full dissertation (either in pdf format or a web link), and dissertation adviser contact information. All applications are due April 1, 2020, and should be sent to [plp22@psu.edu](mailto:plp22@psu.edu). The award will be presented at the Media Ethics Division's Business Meeting during the 2020 AEJMC conference. This award is intended to recognize new scholarship in the fields of media and communication ethics, and is sponsored by the Davis Program in Ethical Leadership at Penn State.

Arrangements for a guest-lecture visit to Penn State will be made for fall 2020 based on recipient availability.

All questions should be directed to Media Ethics Division Research Chair Nicole Kraft, The Ohio State University, [kraft.42@osu.edu](mailto:kraft.42@osu.edu).

## NOTE

Nicole Kraft, our research chair, is now recruiting volunteers for the AEJMC paper competition. If you're interested and available, please fill out this \*short\* survey to let her know your interest in reviewing and areas of expertise: <https://go.osu.edu/medpapers2020>. It's super-quick.

As soon as AEJMC finalizes the All Academic site on their end, Nicole will be in touch with reviewers about how to set up their accounts and the review process.



Market St. San Francisco, c. 1920

# ADVICE & CONSENT: A CASE STUDY

BY TOM BIVINS, EDITOR



*Following is a new column for the newsletter. It's not just about ethical dilemmas, but also about the advice that we, as ethical consultants, are asked to give all the time. The issues are sometimes simple, such as noting that it's not an ethical issue, it's a legal issue. Journalists, especially, sometimes are digging for ethical issues, and are often disappointed to learn there are none. Some, like this one presented here, is about learning as much as anything else. As editor, I took the liberty of kicking off this new column with a recent experience of my own. I do not claim to know all the answers, none of us do. But, this might serve as a conversation starter at least. **I encourage you to submit your experiences.***

## THE ISSUE

I received an email recently from a small college news magazine editor asking my advice on an ethical question their newsroom was struggling with. Here's the gist of the dilemma.

Just the week before, the college released a lengthy report of an investigation of the former president who had retired a about a month prior. The report basically concerned activity from just before and after the retirement announcement. Immediately following the retirement, the college board of trustees read the report and upheld one of four complaints of discrimination by the former president. A month later, the board revised its decision by upholding four out of four complaints of discrimination by the former president.

Subsequently, the college released a heavily redacted version of the report, withholding the names of the four complainants, arguing that state law prevented the release of their names for privacy reasons. The state legislature had recently expanded the reach of that provision when it passed a bill specifically to protect discrimination complainants.

The student journalists were able to identify the complainants by reading the report. Three of them were college vice presidents who are women from systemically non-dominant backgrounds. The fourth person was a professor. The newsroom had then discussed whether to name the complainants in their upcoming issue.

By the time I was contacted, the student journalists were leaning toward naming the three vice presidents but not naming the professor. The thinking was that the three vice presidents were campus public figures but the professor was not. The editor had written to all of them to let them know the newsroom's thinking; however, none of them would agree to talk to students, referring them instead to the college's spokesperson who told them that the complainants preferred not to be named.

The student editor was sensitive to the fact that the women might be concerned that their future job prospects would be harmed by being named as complainants, so suggested an alternative approach involving publishing the names in print but not posting the story to the internet, where the story would live forever. In addition, the local Public Broadcasting station had already named one of the three vice presidents in their stories, so at least one of the complainants was already outed.

The final consideration was that the complaints had already been upheld and the respondent was no longer employed by the college. In addition, the young journalists wondered if the complainants, if named, might then serve as role models for students who may fear speaking up in their own lives.

That was the dilemma.

## THE RESPONSE

Naming those involved in a potentially contentious story, especially if they are victims or complainants, is always a sticky issue. We are seeing that now being played out on a national stage.

Consider that most news outlets do not routinely name victims of crimes (especially sexual assault). There have been, of course, instances in which the victims wanted to be named, and their wishes were granted, often with a great deal of hesitation. In addition, protections for certain categories of individuals, such as whistle blowers in government—which exists at the federal level—and the relevant state law dealing with discrimination complainants that was cited by the student editor, already exist. The rationale is to protect either victims or those whose conscience demands they speak out—free from recrimination in any form, including public opinion.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 8)

I noted that I had been interviewed recently by *The Wall Street Journal* on my opinion as to whether it is ethical for a news outlet to “out” the whistle blower who literally sparked the current impeachment inquiry of the president of the United States. My answer, in brief, was that no respectable journalist would do such a thing. Journalists are supposed to protect their sources, often by sacrificing their own freedom. Why then would you consider revealing a source that’s not even yours?

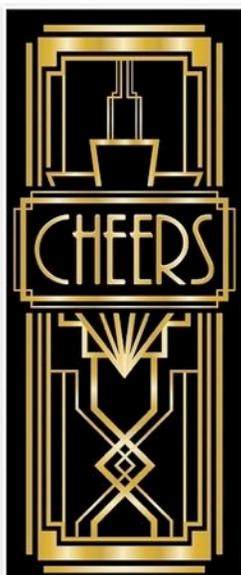
My final thought had to do with being forced into the limelight by well-intentioned journalists. Good intentions are not enough to validate a potentially harmful act. My take on the Public Broadcasting story was that they named a claimant based on a report they obtained via an FOI request and that they used quotes intended to be used as evidence — not as a news story that makes the quotes seem as if they were interviewed by the media, and not those investigating the case. This is problematic. A person’s private, legal testimony is not a journalistic interview freely given knowing that your name and words will be accessible to thousands of people.

Given today’s environment, it is entirely possible that people will react in widely divergent ways to the complainants being named. As the editor notes, it could potentially affect their future job prospects, something a close friend of mine had experienced over 30 years ago. My impression is that that potential is still very much alive and well in the 21st century.

I told them that, personally, I would always err on the side of protecting the victims. No one should be forced to become a role model without their consent. Not naming them doesn’t remove their role model status. Think Diana Prince here. That name just protects her secret identity as Wonder Woman. It doesn’t reduce her value as a role model.

Finally, I cautioned them that using the names in publishing the story at all, whether in print or online, is the same thing. Nothing prevents those reading the print edition from reposting the information online. Just because journalists possess potentially interesting information doesn’t mean they have to release it. The First Amendment simply allows you to do so. Your conscience takes over from there.

I didn’t receive a reply from the student editor, but as far as I can tell, they haven’t at this point run that story.



---

A MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION  
FOR EDUCATION IN JOURNALISM  
AND MASS COMMUNICATION

